



WALTHAM FOREST

HEALTHY WEIGHT STRATEGY

2023-2027



Waltham Forest
Health and
Wellbeing Board



Waltham Forest





Contents

04 | Foreword

06 | Vision

08 | Context

10 | Health inequalities

11 | A healthy weight environment

11 | The role of food

12 | The role of physical activity

13 | The impact of obesity

14 | Whole systems approach

14 | Place focused approaches

14 | Early Years Settings

14 | Schools

16 | Workplaces

16 | Neighbourhoods

17 | People focussed approaches

17 | Interventions aimed at individuals

17 | Interventions aimed at families

18 | Interventions aimed at communities

18 | Interventions aimed at the population

19 | Weight management services

21 | What we will do in the future

Foreword

As chair of the Waltham Forest Health and Wellbeing Board, I welcome this new healthy weight strategy for our borough. Healthy weight has been a priority area of work for the Local Authority and our partners for a number of years now and great progress has been made towards establishing a successful whole systems approach to creating a healthy weight environment for our residents. This has included reshaping many of our public spaces to make cycling and walking safer and more attractive, establishing new spaces for food growing and physical activity, supporting schools and early years settings to offer healthier environments and restricting the number of hot food takeaways around our schools and on our high streets. However, our latest data makes it clear that there is still much to do.

More recently, we have also established health inequalities as a top local priority, and the recent report A Fairer and Healthier Waltham Forest from the Institute of Health Equity, identified the importance of an effective local approach to obesity, that seeks to reduce inequality between groups of people. We know that some people are at much higher risk of developing obesity than others and we know that individuals who are above the healthy weight range are at risk of a number of health conditions such as type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, cancer and mental health problems. Obesity is one of the biggest preventable causes of health inequalities and therefore supporting a healthy weight for everyone is a core part of our vision.

We also want to directly address the stigma that people experience in relation to their weight. For too long people have focused on the choices individuals make, trying to inform and motivate them to make changes. This is far too simplistic and has led to a culture of blame and stigma which leads to people feeling a sense of shame over their weight and their health. This strategy clearly highlights the importance of the environment in which people live as a determinant of peoples lifestyles and we will raise awareness of this, so that people living with overweight and obesity are treated with empathy and understanding when accessing health services, education, employment and any other aspect of society.

This approach requires the work of many different teams and organisations and I call on all our partners across Waltham Forest to work together over the next five years and beyond to deliver our shared vision for a healthy weight environment. By doing this, we will create a borough where the healthy choices are the easiest choices and will improve the health and quality of life of all our residents.



Cllr Naheed Asghar



Vision

Waltham Forest Council and local partners have worked together to create a shared vision for our strategy, which is based on the views and opinions of our residents.

Our vision is to create a borough that:
 ...makes healthy choices easier for everyone
And
 ...is more understanding and supportive
 towards people living with obesity

Our objectives are to:



Adopt a whole system approach and ensure community and stakeholder collaboration and engagement over the long-term



Improve awareness of the causes and experiences of obesity to reduce stigma



Create environments that support healthy behaviours across different settings including early years settings, schools, workplaces and neighbourhoods



Support access to healthy food for our residents, particularly those in financial hardship



Support individuals, families and communities to make healthy choices



Offer high quality, comprehensive weight management services and pathways to those who are already living with overweight or obesity

We have based our vision on the evidence for a whole systems approach and the views of our residents, collected through focus groups and a resident health survey that received over

1,200
responses



Our residents survey showed that:



Maintaining a healthy weight is important to **89%** residents.



However, **48%** of respondents said that they find maintaining a healthy weight difficult.



Only **27%** were happy with their current weight.

This suggests that maintaining a healthy weight is important to most residents but around half have found it difficult. It's clear that there is still a long way to go in developing an environment where the healthy choices are naturally easier than the unhealthy choices. We will work to make healthier choices easier for everyone.

In recent years it has also become clear that the poor health outcomes associated with obesity are exacerbated by negative views many people hold of those living with obesity. These negative views, or stigma, increase stress and anxiety, cause disordered eating, delay or prevent access to health services and lead to poorer experiences when people do access.

Obesity stigma also impacts on some of the root causes of poor health. For example, children living with obesity are known to have poorer experiences of education and academic achievements,¹ and adults living with obesity are more likely to be unemployed.

“Institutionalised fatphobia is an attitude which I have repeatedly experienced, and which has stopped me from seeking treatment for physical and mental health conditions before...”

Waltham Forest Resident, age 35-44

To reduce the stigma connected to overweight and obesity, there is a need to improve everyone's understanding of the many, complex causes of obesity and to move away from focusing on individual choices. When we do promote healthy lifestyles to our residents, this should be done in a non-stigmatising, supportive way.

Context

The National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) collects height and weight measurements from Reception and year 6 children.

In recent years, Reception children in Waltham Forest have shown very similar levels of children living with overweight and obesity compared to the national average. However, the levels of children living with overweight and obesity (referred to as 'excess weight') in Year 6 have been consistently above the national level, and this gap was particularly noticeable during the pandemic, although appears to have reduced somewhat in the most recent year's data.



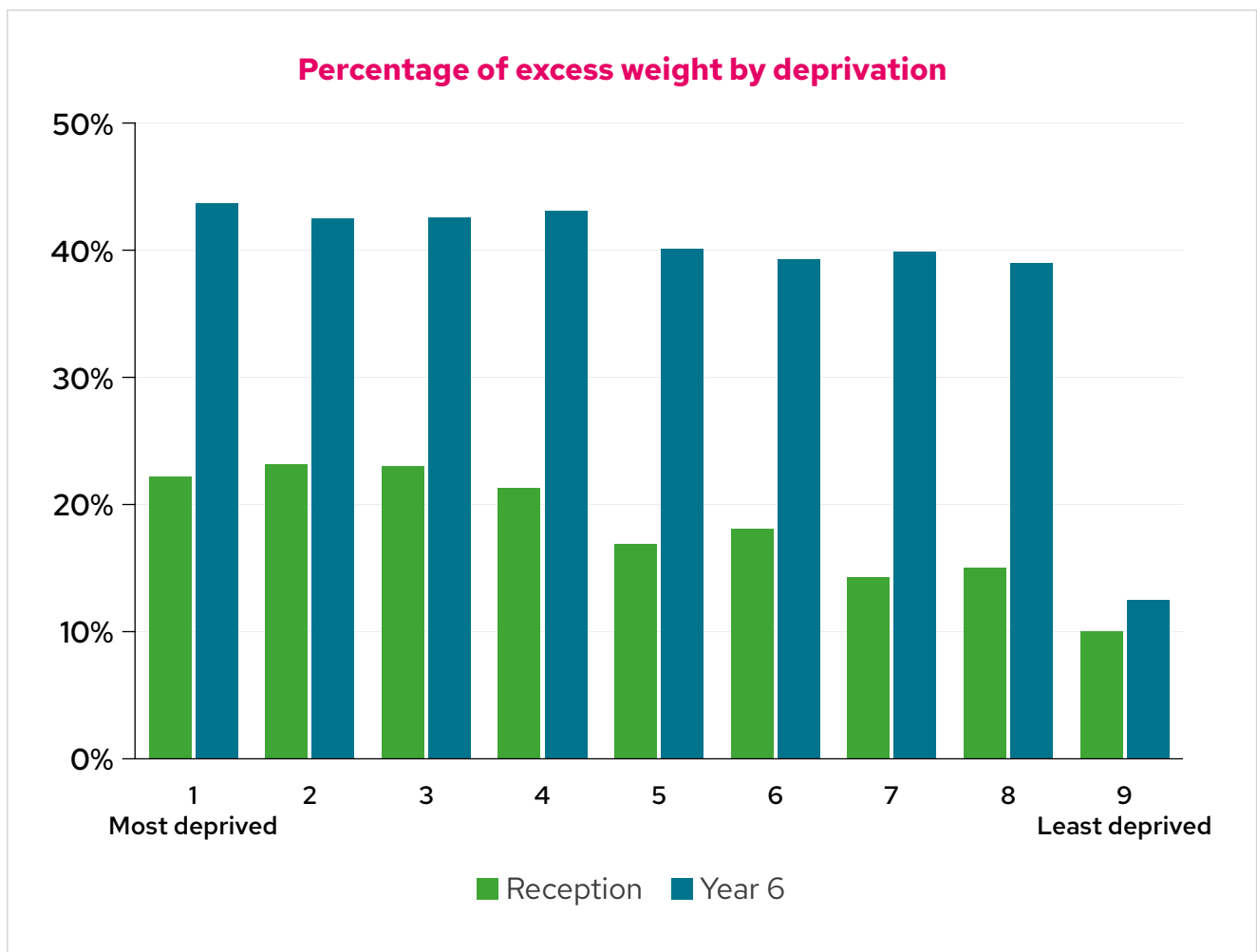
In Waltham Forest, **55% of adults are overweight or obese**. This is similar to the London level of **56%** but significantly lower than the national level of **64%**. This estimate would mean there are approximately **115,000 adults in Waltham Forest living with overweight or obesity** and these levels have remained fairly stable for the past five years.



Health inequalities

Health inequalities are avoidable, unfair, and systematic differences in health between different groups of people.

Overweight and obesity is known to contribute significantly to health inequalities, particularly in terms of: deprivation, ethnicity and sex. Inequalities in health and wellbeing that begin at school age are likely to persist and influence health at all ages. In 2021/22, both Reception and Year 6 aged children in the most deprived groups were more likely to be living with overweight or obesity compared to their peers in the least deprived groups.



Waltham Forest have worked with the Sir Michael Marmot Institute of Health Equity² to review health inequalities in the borough and agree a set of actions to tackle them. Successful delivery of our healthy weight strategy will be crucial to our work to reduce health inequalities in coming years.

Healthy weight environment

At an individual level, a person's body weight will increase if the amount of energy taken in from food and drink is greater than they use through the body's metabolism and physical activity. But the drivers of weight gain are complicated and include the social factors around a person.

While the individual choices people make in their daily lives are important, the evidence is now clear that the biggest factor shaping these choices is the food and physical activity environments in which people live. The barriers to a healthy weight identified by our residents reflect this.

The drivers of weight gain identified by our residents include:



67%

Easy availability of unhealthy food and drink



64%

The cost of healthy food and drink



57%

Lack of time to lead a healthy lifestyle



52%

Too much advertising of unhealthy food and drink



46%

Lack of FREE opportunity/resources to be physically active

The food environment

The food environment promotes unhealthy diets from the very earliest stages of life. Breast feeding is strongly associated with reduced future risk of overweight and obesity in children and in the UK we have some of the lowest rates of breastfeeding in the world.³ Explanations for this include the stigma around feeding in public and lack of designated spaces to do so, as well as the promotion of alternatives, often by the formula industry.

Further on, when children start to become aware of food choices around them, they are faced with tempting, unhealthy options such as brightly coloured and carefully placed sweet snacks around supermarket check outs. As children then progress to the point where they have some or complete control over their food choices, there are many cheap, attractive options available in hot food takeaways and other outlets that are often high in fat, salt and sugar.

In Waltham Forest there are **246 hot food takeaways** which is around **90** for every **100,000** residents and these are often found close to schools.

Advertising of unhealthy foods further promotes unhealthy choices and the link between junk food advertising and childhood obesity is well established. Evidence also shows that people living in more deprived areas are exposed to more junk food advertising.⁴

Similarly for adults, the availability of cheap, abundant unhealthy food in supermarkets, cafes, delivery services and workplace canteens and vending machines further influence food choices that are often deeply entrenched by this point.

The environment and physical activity

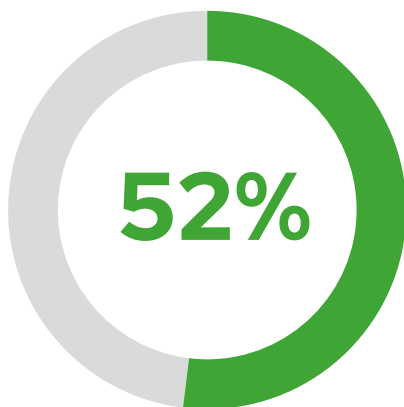
The obesogenic environment also makes physical activity less attractive and accessible for many and sedentary routines have now become embedded

into people's daily lives. Again, this can be seen throughout the entire life course. Research suggests that children's physical activity levels decrease each year between Reception and Year 6, as sedentary leisure activities replace physically active play.

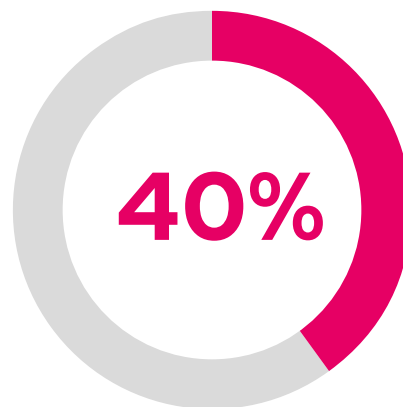


In adulthood, desk-based occupations, regular use of screen time for both work and leisure and other inactive forms of entertainment all contribute to low physical activity levels.

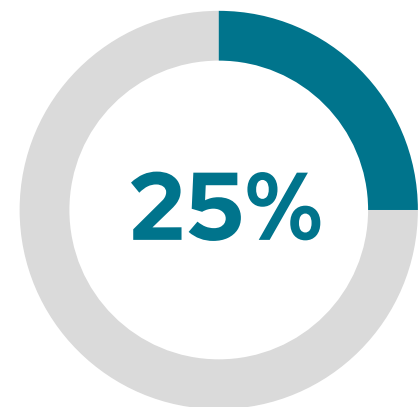
In Waltham Forest⁵:



of children and young people are currently meeting recommended activity levels.



of adult residents are estimated to do less than the recommended 150 minutes of moderate physical activity per week.



of adults are classed as physically inactive, meaning that they do less than 30 minutes per week of moderate activity.

*Data from a residents survey.

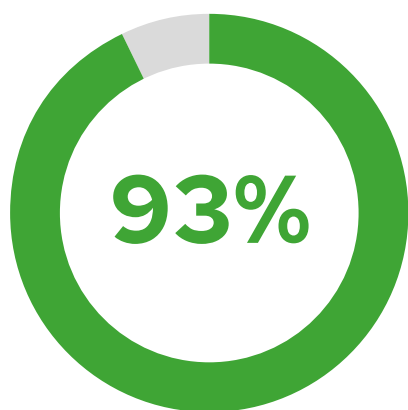
The impact of obesity

Evidence suggests preventing obesity can help reduce inequalities in many other health outcomes over the life course.

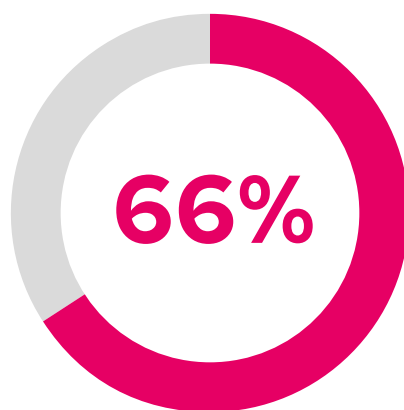
For an individual, the health impact of obesity can include a higher risk of serious conditions including cardiovascular disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes. Pregnant people living with overweight and obesity may be at increased risk of health complications during pregnancy.⁶ Generally, these risks are higher with increases in BMI.⁷ People who are obese are also more likely to live with mental health conditions and to be unemployed, as a result of weight-related stigma.

There is also increased demand on the health and social care system. Adults with severe obesity are likely to have difficulties with daily activities and as more people are living with obesity, the associated needs and expectations for social care services are also likely to increase. It is estimated that obesity accounts for 80-85% of the overall risk for developing type 2 diabetes and this may increase the complexity of care needs in later life. Diabetes UK estimate the annual cost of caring for people with diabetes in adult social care settings in England at £830 million.⁸

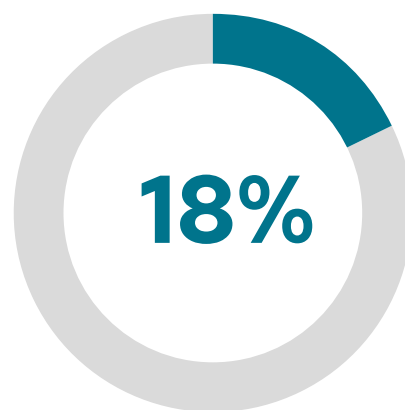
Resident views on healthy weight with a limiting long-term illness or disability⁹



of residents living with long term conditions said maintaining a healthy weight is important.



of residents living with long term conditions said it was difficult to maintain a healthy weight.



of residents living with long term conditions said they were happy with their current weight.

Whole systems approach

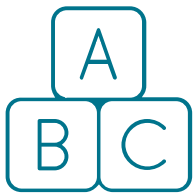
In line with the evidence base, we are working to develop a whole systems approach to obesity.

It is widely recognised that many different factors together combine to create an environment that prevents people from leading healthy lifestyles and contributes to obesity. It therefore follows that a unified response consisting of many different interventions is required.

Within our whole systems approach, we will take forward actions to promote healthy lifestyles in two strategic areas. These are 'Place' and 'People'.

Place focussed approaches

In line with our vision, we will work to create an environment that supports our residents by making healthy choices easier. We will prioritise action in the following four settings:



1

Early years settings



2

Schools



3

Workplaces



4

Neighbourhoods

1. Healthy early years settings

Taking a whole settings approach to promoting healthy food and physical activity can shape healthy behaviours from an early age, and early years settings can help lay the foundations for lifelong health and wellbeing. The Healthy Early Years London (HEYL) scheme recognises good practice in child health, wellbeing, and development in early years settings and encourages children to try new foods, walk to school and be more active. In Waltham Forest there are currently 54 settings registered to the award scheme.

2. Healthy schools

Schools are another good opportunity to provide a healthy environment that shapes behaviours from an early age. The Healthy Schools programme supports the development of a whole school approach to promoting good health and wellbeing. School based initiatives that have been shown to support healthy weight include daily running or walking, known as the Daily Mile, being in a 'water only school' environment and offering school meals that meet the national school food standards.

Waltham Forest is also implementing a school superzone programme, a targeted approach to improve health in a small number of schools identified as having some of the highest levels of need. The work focuses on the 400m zone around the school, with interventions to enhance positive impacts on health like green spaces, and reduce negative ones, such as the food offer in hot food takeaways and traffic and poor air quality outside the school.





3. Healthy workplaces

For many working age adults, a large proportion of time is spent at work, which makes workplaces important in supporting a healthy weight and lifestyle. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has forced many working practices to change, how employers support workers to lead a healthy lifestyle can impact on obesity.

Until recently, the Mayor of London's Healthy Workplace Award aimed to encourage employers to support employees to achieve these aims. However, since this scheme was withdrawn, there is a need to establish an effective local approach to promoting healthy workplaces.

4. Healthy neighbourhoods

Reconnecting our residents with their local communities has the potential to increase physical activity levels and making it easier to access everyday essentials via a 15-minute walk, wheel, or cycle from our residents' homes is one of the main aims of our 15-minute neighbourhood programme.

Improvements to road layout to prioritise people, including those cycling and walking, over vehicles is another important approach to promote active travel and increase physical activity levels. The Enjoy Waltham Forest programme aims to achieve this by building new sustainable travel infrastructure which will create people friendly streets and neighbourhoods.

Evidence shows that food consumed outside of the home now makes up a significant part of many people's diets. The Healthier Catering Commitment (HCC) is a scheme that encourages businesses in London to provide healthier food options by reducing the levels of saturated fat, salt and sugar in the foods they sell. There are currently over 60 businesses in Waltham Forest accredited.

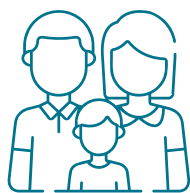
People focussed approaches

Our approach to changing behaviours focuses primarily on changing the food and physical activity environment in which people in Waltham Forest live. However, evidence also suggests that timely, targeted support for individuals can support them on a journey of behaviour change that will allow them to maintain a healthy weight. We will support our residents to adopt healthier lifestyles at four levels:



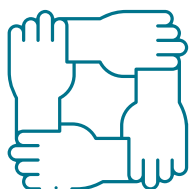
1

Interventions aimed at **individuals**



2

Interventions aimed at **families**



3

Interventions aimed at **communities**



4

Interventions aimed at the **population**

1. Interventions targeted at individuals

Evidence shows that even very brief advice from a trusted person can have an impact on health behaviours. The thousands of interactions that frontline staff in Waltham Forest have with residents on a daily basis provides an opportunity to deliver evidence-based information and advice, including signposting to further support. Frontline staff are supported to do this through a Making Every Contact Count training programme.

The most popular way residents responding to our survey stated they would like to receive information about healthy weight was from a medical professional. Research shows that well planned, brief interventions in primary care can increase the chances of a patient making a successful weight loss attempt.¹⁰

2. Interventions targeted at families

Family level interventions are particularly important for healthy weight. Families share patterns of eating and physical activity behaviour such as what and how much is available to eat, how leisure time is spent etc. Family level interventions are also important for encouraging healthy lifestyles from the earliest stages of life.

Antenatal care provides one of the earliest opportunities to intervene in health behaviours and weight. Midwives carry out comprehensive health assessments, including of BMI, for all pregnant women. Healthy weight, diet and physical activity is discussed at every interaction during pregnancy.

Following birth, there are crucial opportunities to support new parents, including the uptake and maintenance of breastfeeding. Health visitors provide crucial support to families in the early days of a child's life and promote breastfeeding, healthy nutrition and lifestyles including assessment of weight and growth at each of the mandatory 5 contacts.

The UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative is an evidence-based way of increasing breastfeeding rates, enabling health care professionals' to effectively support all mothers with feeding.

Pregnant women, new mothers, and families receiving certain benefits and with children under 4 are able to receive a Healthy Start card, which enables them to buy free, healthy foods like milk, fruit and vegetables, as well as receiving free vitamins.

3. Interventions targeted at communities

Learning from our response to the COVID-19 pandemic shows that engaging communities in changing behaviours is important and can be a way of reducing health inequalities.

Community champions, who have the ability to relate to their fellow community members and engage often hard to reach groups in health issues, can be effective at supporting healthier behaviours.¹¹

4. Interventions targeted at the population

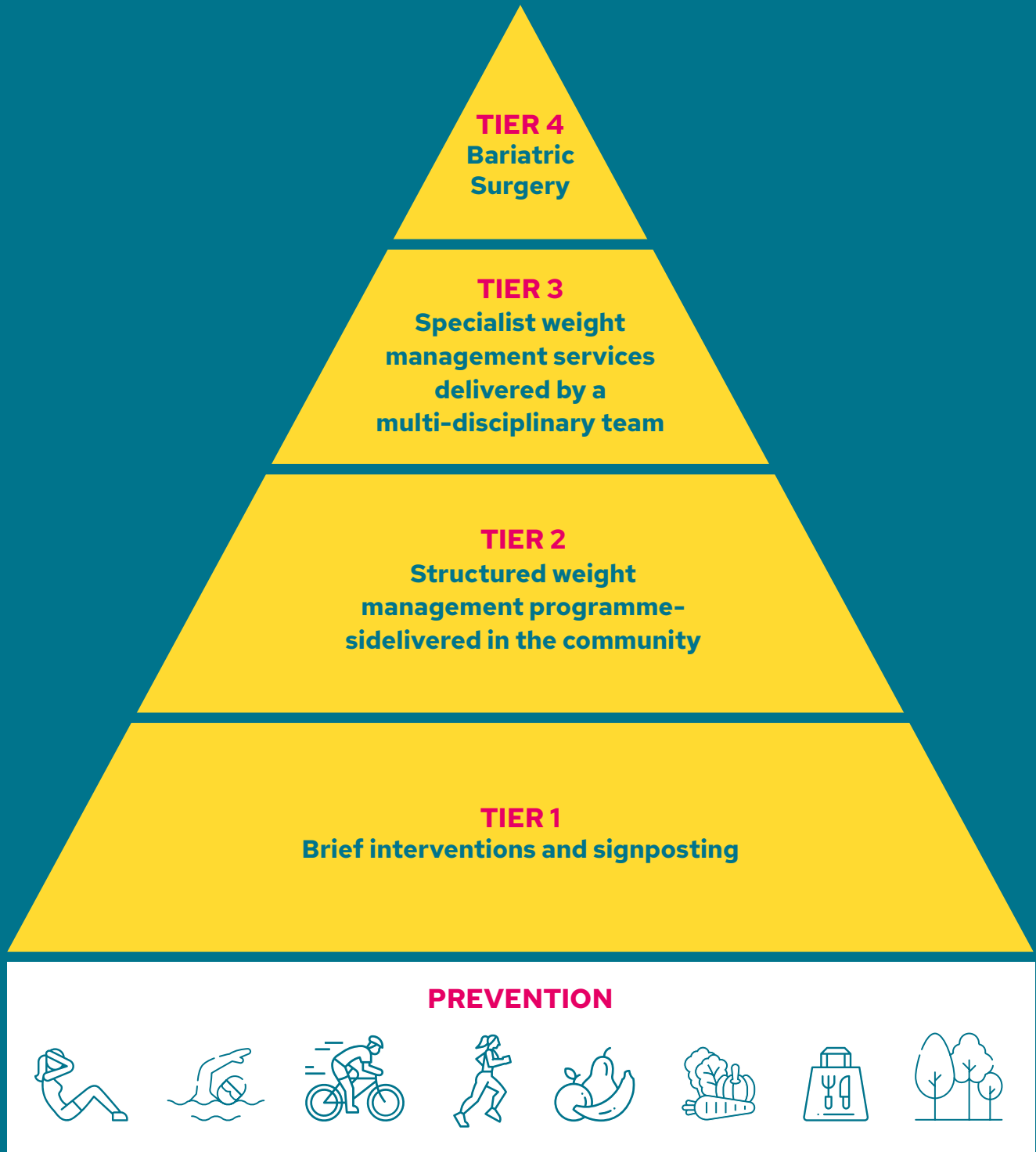
Evidence based public campaigns can be effective at changing behaviours at a population level by nudging residents, businesses and others to make changes. Our campaigns aim to amplify national healthy weight campaigns such as Change4Life and Sugar Smart aimed at children and the One You adult health promotion campaign.



Weight management services

In addition to a strong focus on prevention, a comprehensive local approach should also include access to weight management services to support those living with overweight or obesity to reduce their risk and improve their health. Currently, the weight management offer for residents in Waltham Forest consists of a mixture of local, regional and national services and is delivered through a 4-tiered approach shown in the table below.

These services should be equitable and coordinated with care pathways that allow GPs and other health professionals to refer patients that need support.





What we will do next

Whole systems approach	
1	Promote our shared vision to the whole system, so everyone is working towards the same aim.
2	Establish a healthy weight network across the Waltham Forest system to share ideas, progress and best practice. Aim to hold one network event per year for all stakeholders.
3	Continue to engage with members of the community. We cannot change the system without the input of those who participate in it.

Stigma	
1	Work to improve understanding of the causes and experiences of obesity, shifting away from focus on poor choices and personal responsibility, to the obesogenic environment.
2	Ensure all our campaigns and publications take a person-first, non-stigmatising approach when talking about obesity.

Place focussed approaches	
1	Support early years settings and schools to establish health promoting settings for our children and young people.
2	Implement a targeted approach to improving health in schools with the highest levels of need through the school superzone programme.
3	Explore options for supporting businesses in Waltham Forest to establish healthy workplaces.
4	Continue to engage the community across Waltham Forest help to shape the 15-Minute Neighbourhoods vision and ensure that the strategy is aligned with the health needs of local communities.
5	Continue work to develop healthy streets and other public realm that prioritise active travel over car use.
6	Ensure our green spaces are enhanced and promoted to all our residents.
7	Engage more businesses in the Healthier Catering Commitment, particularly those that are located near schools and other facilities used by children and young people.

Place focussed approaches (continued)	
8	Ensure new developments in the borough consider health impacts of proposals at an early stage and take steps to maximise the positive impacts and minimise the negative ones.
9	Publish a new food growing strategy to build on past achievements in encouraging food growing in the community and ensure those most at risk of overweight and obesity are supported to participate.
10	Publish a new sport and physical activity strategy to increase physical activity in those with the lowest levels currently.
11	Work to deliver the Waltham Forest food insecurity commission commitment to distribution of healthy, fresh, high quality and culturally appropriate food to those who need support.

People focussed approaches	
1	Continue to roll out our MECC (Making Every Contact Count) training offer to support non-stigmatising, supportive conversations between frontline staff and residents and assess further training needs for GPs and pharmacists to ensure they are comfortable raising the issue of weight with their patients.
2	Mobilise and deliver the new 0-19 contract to promote healthy lifestyles at an early stage for all our residents.
3	Review and improve healthy weight promotion opportunities during pregnancy, including the content of mandatory training for midwives and the new birth pack.
4	Continue to develop the local NCMP programme, maintaining excellent participation rates in Waltham Forest and implement behaviourally informed approaches to ensure the best possible support for families with children living with overweight and obesity.
5	Pilot a community health champions programme in Waltham Forest and evaluate the impact to inform future commissioning decisions.
6	Further improve our targeting of campaigns to achieve behaviour change among groups with the highest overweight and obesity levels. In particular we will continue to develop, implement and evaluate campaigns to improve breastfeeding rates, particularly in groups with the lowest rates.
7	Increase uptake of the Healthy Start scheme among those eligible.

Weight management services and pathways

1	Improve local awareness of the services available to Waltham Forest residents and how to access them and work collaboratively with commissioners and providers to use the resources we do have as efficiently and effectively as possible.
2	Review local weight management services to ensure they are being accessed equitably by all population groups, particularly residents from Black and Asian groups and those from lower socioeconomic groups.
3	Identify any fill any existing gaps in our pathways and work to establish longer-term, stable pathways wherever possible, within resource constraints.

References

1. <https://bmcpublikealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-022-12538-w>
2. Michael Marmot, Jessica Allen, Tammy Boyce, Peter Goldblatt, Scarlet Willis, Owen Callaghan (2022). A fairer and healthier Waltham Forest: equity and the social determinants of health. London: Institute of Health Equity.
3. <https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/about/benefits-of-breastfeeding/>
4. <https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/feb22-advertising-policy-toolkit/#:~:text=A%20local%20government%20guide%20for%20restricting%20unhealthy%20food%20advertising.&text=Advertising%20for%20unhealthy%20foods%20and,child%20obesity%20and%20health%20inequalities.>
5. Data taken from residents survey.
6. www.rcog.org.uk/
7. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/obesity-and-overweight>
8. <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/social-care-and-obesity-d-b2c.pdf>
9. Data taken from residents survey.
10. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/737903/weight_management_toolkit_Let_s_talk_about_weight.pdf
11. <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng44/resources/community-engagement-improving-health-and-wellbeing-and-reducing-health-inequalities-pdf-1837452829381>

If you have any feedback, comments
or suggestions, or would like to receive our
healthy weight newsletter, contact us at
public.health@walthamforest.gov.uk